

Callous About Injustice

After spending more than seven years in a Missouri prison for a bank robbery he evidently did not commit, Ernest Turley is still confronted by officials who refuse to recognize that the criminal justice system can make errors. On July 19 the U.S. House Assassinations Committee wrote to Gov. Teasdale that, during its Missouri investigation related to the Martin Luther King murder, it found two men who attested to the fact that they had actually committed the 1970 robbery of the Laddonia bank for which Turley was convicted. Yet Turley was kept in prison until Sept. 26 before he was paroled to a halfway house — a step that occurred in the normal course of events without regard to the evidence of his innocence.

The excuse of the governor's staff is that consideration of a pardon must await a formal application and that Turley's attorney is still lining out the extensive paper work. When an injustice has evidently been done, however, the state should assume the burden of expediting a correction. Turley's case for a pardon is but-

tressed not only by the evidence supplied by the Assassinations Committee — one of whose witnesses said he lied about Turley's participation in the robbery because of a grudge — but also by evidence indicating that bank witnesses were far from certain of his identity. Despite his acquittal in a federal trial, Turley was tried and convicted in a state proceeding, which the U.S. Supreme Court refused to recognize was a violation of his constitutional right not to be placed twice in jeopardy for the same offense.

Although strong evidence now supports Turley's years-long contention that he was innocent, a cocksure prosecutor still declines to admit a mistake, and the pardoning process is bogged down in red tape. When the state has reason to believe it has brought about a wrongful conviction, it should move rapidly to exonerate (pardon is the wrong word) and to reimburse the victim of injustice — although, Turley's case, he can never be repaid for years in prison and the resulting breakdown of his family.

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